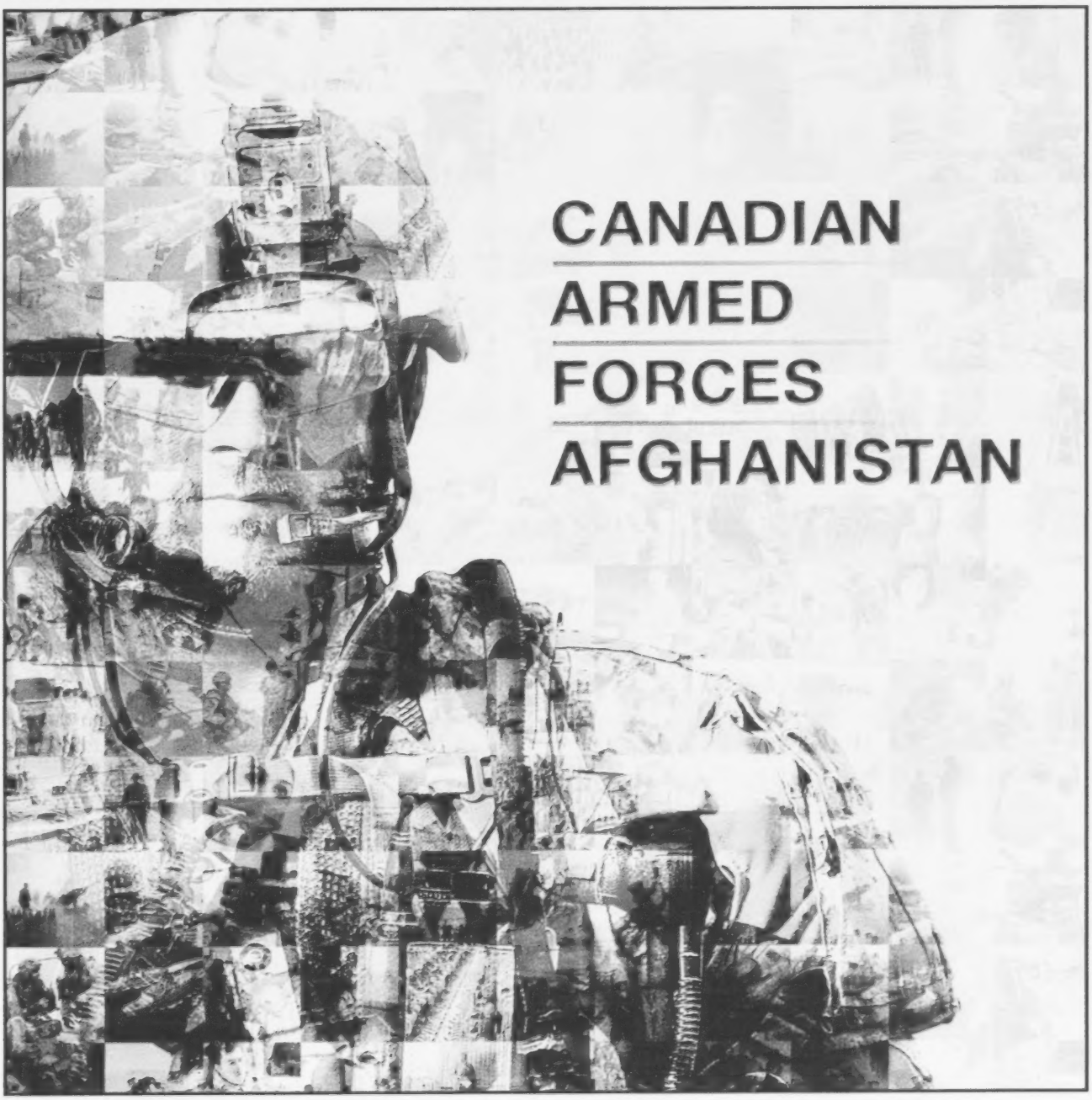
THE Maple Leaf / LA Feuille d'érable

March 2014, Volume 17, Number 3 | Keeping the Defence Team informed | Français au verso



National Defence / Défense nationale

Canada

The CDS and Afghanistan

"Canada is expertly positioned for future challenges, wherever they may be, largely as a result of our experiences in Afghanistan."

With the longest military mission in our nation's history drawing to a close, we sat down with the Chief of the Defence Staff, General Tom Lawson, to reflect on the accomplishments of the men and women who served and supported our mission in Afghanistan and look at lessons learned as the Canadian Armed Forces move forward.

"We have changed significantly," said General Lawson. "What I've noticed is the sharp focus that comes with being in a dangerous conflict. Certainly it focused the Army, who had the majority of boots outside the wire, from the training through to carrying out the operations, and then looking after our soldiers when they came back."

The co-operation and teamwork displayed by the services was strongly evident, most notably in the early stages of the mission, with the Navy being the first to deploy after 9/11, followed by the Air Force and Army making preparations to move out shortly thereafter.

"The interoperation amongst our services was great," said General Lawson. "This is something we will leverage in the coming years. We've got an entire generation of young members who have seen what it's like to work very closely as a team. So while they are proud of whatever uniform they wear, they see right away the power of working together."

OUR ALLIES

Working closely with our allies was also very important and has changed things for the CAF, offering the opportunity to work and train closely with the United States, Britain, Australia and the Netherlands to name a few.

"Now you take it a step further, as this has given us the opportunity to work very closely as battle-buddies," said General Lawson. "This will have an effect over generations to come, especially in training activities as we prepare for future operations."

RETAINING OUR SKILLS

With the military mission in Afghanistan drawing to a close, the operational tempo of the CAF will be reduced from the heights of the last 12 years. The challenge now will be to ensure that the CAF maintains the skills and lessons learned from the past decade, and focus on our operations still underway around the globe.

"This is the issue that will seize us as we go forward. You have the challenge of losing that everyday focus. While we still have operations out of country, we don't have the focus of an International Security Assistance Force or a NATO operation that large," said General Lawson.

"This gives us an opportunity to cement the general lessons that we can take out of the assessment of where we've been, and bring them into our doctrine and training to make sure that we take the right approach moving forwards."

An important lesson the CDS noted is that every conflict is different and what we learned in Afghanistan may not apply to the next operation. "There are specific lessons that apply to that geography, but then there are much broader lessons that apply to conflicts across our forces. So what do we bring in? How do we train together to support the forces? This is our challenge."

THE WORLD STAGE

Canada has partnered with many Allies in this mission, and this has changed how we are viewed on the world stage.

"That's a tremendous by-product from the main effort of being there," he said. "Fighting alongside our allies had a purpose, and that was to buy the hope of a future for Afghans. But one of the by-products was that Canadians were seen to be committed to the goals of the Alliance for the best outcomes for Afghanistan. This commitment included a willingness to get their hands dirty. They did this extremely well, not only in leadership positions but also in the most difficult parts of Afghanistan. Our partners saw that Canada is a responsible ally in the toughest situations. The positive reverberations from that will continue for years."

LOOKING BACK OVER 12 YEARS

NATO ACCOMPLISHMENTS

"If we look at what they [NATO] accomplished, we see many remarkable achievements in Afghanistan," said General Lawson. "There were the thousands of kilometres of roads built, millions of children going to school and a government that has grown from Kabul-centric and is supported by the Afghan National Security Forces."

To get to the point where we are today, the CAF had an initial period of intense conflict to help build and grow the Afghan security into this last phase where the NATO training mission in Afghanistan has been successful in helping to raise the levels of the Afghan National Security Forces.

"So there are tremendous markers that would suggest much of what the Alliance was seeking to do has been accomplished, but the final chapter hasn't been written. The Afghan nation and Afghan security forces will now write that last chapter," said General Lawson.

CANADIAN ACCOMPLISHMENTS

"As a group we can be so proud of the Navy and Army units that rotated through and were supported by the Air Force and the great stories of the Reservists providing so much support to our Regular Force troops," said General Lawson. "The development of not only the training back in Canada, but of our recognition of building resistance for our men and women in uniform, helping them deal with what they saw in-theatre, and also realizing how important it is to look after them as they reintegrate into their units back home."

"Speaking strategically, as we come out of Afghanistan, probably the greatest return for our Canadian Armed Forces and our nation is that Canada has been recognized as a responsible ally who is willing and able to take on the really tough roles ... the effect of that accomplishment that will last for years as we watch very closely what happens in Afghanistan to see what the next chapter will be."

THE HOME FRONT

The CAF will continue for years with the challenges that come from being in a conflict and it is making strides in helping its members move forward. The CDS recognizes that the family component is a huge part of the deployment process and that mission success can't happen without their families being taken care of back home.

"The support of our families and their efforts to look after the home front has been absolutely critical for our success," he said. "We've tried to bolster their confidence throughout the years by ensuring that when their loved ones deployed, they had the finest training, leadership, and preparation. With their return, many of our members have been able to rest up, recover, and with the support of their families, to get ready for the next challenge that comes along. With that strength and support we'll continue to be ready when Canada needs us." ♣

PHOTO: MCpl Freida Van Putten

Chief of Defence Staff (CDS), General Tom Lawson addresses Canadian Contribution Training Mission – Afghanistan ROTO 3 members during a town hall at Camp Blackhorse, Kabul, Afghanistan on September 19, 2013 during Operation ATTENTION.

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The Maple Leaf is the monthly national publication of the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces, and is published under the authority of the Assistant Deputy Minister (Public Affairs).

ISSN 1480-4336 ✦ NDID/ DDN A-JS-000-003/JP-001

COVER:

A special edition of *The Maple Leaf* dedicated to Canada's mission in Afghanistan

Minister's message

In 2001, following the events of 9/11, Canada and the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) began a defining chapter in our history by pledging our support to international efforts to combat terrorism. As announced by the Prime Minister at the NATO Summit in Chicago in May 2012, Canada's mission in Afghanistan will end in March 2014. By that time, the CAF will have been in Afghanistan approximately the same length of time as the First World War, the Second World War and the Korean War combined. In conjunction with the Government of Canada as a whole, we have an essential role to play in telling Canada's story of the hard work, sacrifice and continuous improvement made on-the-ground by our men and women in uniform.

The importance of Canada's contribution to Afghanistan cannot be understated. More than 40,000 Canadians have served in Afghanistan demonstrating strength in battle and strength in assisting Afghans to build for themselves a better country. The support these brave Canadians received at home from their families, from their communities and from all Canadians never wavered. No recent activity emphasizes this commitment more than our successes and sacrifices made in Afghanistan.

I would like to personally thank all Canadian Armed Forces members and their families, as well as our civilian staff both at home and abroad, for their impeccable hard work and commitment to bringing tangible improvements to the daily lives of the Afghan people. The Government takes great pride in the work of the CAF and all that you have achieved in Afghanistan, accomplishments which have been earned from great sacrifice. We can bring our mission in Afghanistan to a close knowing that your service has contributed to clearing a path to hope and opportunity for the Afghan people.

You – the incredible men and women in uniform – remain our most important asset, and we remain committed to providing you and your families with the best care and services possible. By the end of March 2014, our operations in Afghanistan will have drawn down, and our members will have returned to a thankful and grateful Canada. I believe I can speak for all Canadians when I say how immensely proud we are of the work accomplished in Afghanistan as you continue to uphold Canada's superb reputation on the international stage. ♣

The Honourable Robert Nicholson
Minister of National Defence

PHOTO: MCpl Robert Buffett

Having completed their tour of duty, Canadian Armed Forces personnel board a CC-177 Globemaster III at Kandahar Airfield in February 2009.

PHOTO: MCpl Michel Durand

HMCS *St. John's* (pictured far left) operating in and around the Gulf of Oman in September 2002, as part of Operation APOLLO – Canada's military contribution to the international campaign against terrorism.

PHOTO: MCpl Karl Mackay

Cpl Tim Thomas of 1 Combat Engineer Regiment of Edmonton, Alberta, and Afghan soldiers put barbed wire around the perimeter of a police station compound.

Clearance Divers and the Afghanistan experience

CPO 1 Darrell P. Colwell, coxswain of the Fleet Diving Unit (Pacific) in Esquimalt, at the helm of Yard Diving Tender 11.

It has been two years since the last deployed clearance diver returned home from the dusty roads and blistering deserts of the Pashmul region in Kandahar Province in southern Afghanistan.

More than 945 km from the nearest port, it is often asked what we, as divers, were doing in Afghanistan in the first place. The answer to that question is relatively easy but requires a brief understanding of the clearance diver occupations history. The trade originated in 1952 in Halifax, N.S. and subsequently in Victoria (Esquimalt), B.C. in 1954.

In its simplest definition, the purpose of the clearance diver trade is to clear harbours of mines to allow safe passage for the Royal Canadian Navy's (RCN's) ships. This capability required a detailed knowledge of explosives. To acquire this expertise members are trained to conduct all explosive related tasks on the surface prior to attempting the same task underwater.

It is this inherent explosive adeptness that provided additional personnel, in the form of clearance divers and clearance diving officers, as augmentation to the Army lead operation in Afghanistan. The application of our specific skill-set was instrumental in combating one of the Taliban's and Al Qaeda's favourite weapons, the improvised explosive device (IED).

A small trade of almost 125 non-commissioned members and 40 officers; approximately 40 percent have served on tours in the Afghan theatre. Our personnel have received many accolades for the success of contributions within the mission and although we are extremely proud of our accomplishments, it has come with a heavy price in the loss of one of our brethren and the remaining wounds of others.

The return to water is like the embrace of a mother to a newborn infant and slowly the memories fade. We collectively move on, continue to train and prepare as we remain "Ready Aye Ready" for our next RCN task. ♣

On duty but far from the sea

BY LCDR ALAIN BLONDIN

On 8 October 2001, less than a month after the 9/11 attack, HMCS Halifax *was ordered away from its mission in the Mediterranean Sea and proceeded to the Persian Gulf and Arabian Sea near Afghanistan.* Halifax *was later joined by three other Canadian war vessels. They formed the first naval task group to deploy under Operation APOLLO. Over the course of the operation, nearly all RCN major naval surface combatants rotated through the region, with over 4,000 sailors deployed. Following Op APOLLO, Navy sailors continued to serve in and around Afghanistan; this article recounts one sailor's experience.*

"Beached sailors" is one way to describe all the would-be salty dogs who served with me on Operation ATHENA in 2008.

LCdr Alain Blondin (then Lt(N)) standing by one of the bomb shelters at Camp Nathan Smith, waiting for a helicopter ride to Kandahar Airfield in January 2009.

There were approximately 60 members of Task Force Kandahar who normally wore the dark blues. Although many were in what we call "purple occupations" – those related to logistics or other support – the majority still proudly identified themselves as sailors.

Among those of the senior service doing their bit in Afghanistan during that tour were clearance divers, cooks, maritime surface and sub-surface (MARS) officers, supply technicians, logistics officers, stewards, naval communicators, military police, resource management support clerks, JAGs, physician assistants, a nurse, a doctor, a social worker, a chaplain and a public affairs officer.

There were west coast, east coast and landlocked sailors. Two of them, including myself, had served in submarines (V boats and O boats). At the time, we had collectively sailed in more than 40 different ships and submarines, but the saltiest Canadian sailor in Kandahar Province was former Chief Petty Officer, 2nd Class Stephen Amos, a naval combat information operator who had served in 13 Canadian and US ships from 1973 to 2007.

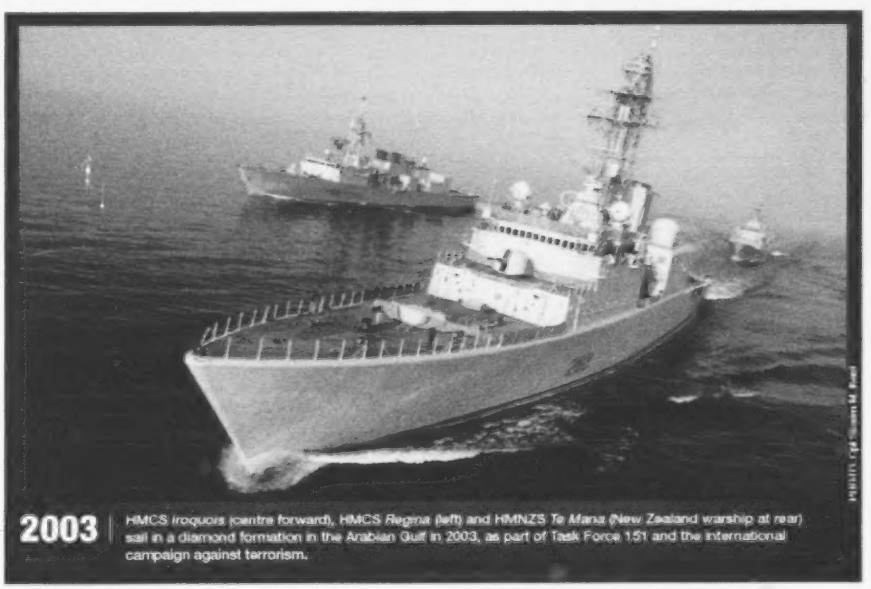
CPO 2 Amos worked at the Operations Coordination Centre for the Province in Kandahar City. Another character, Padre James Brown, the Roman Catholic Chaplain and father of souls in KAF, had worked hard during his tour in order to convert his sun-baked Army parish to more appropriate naval terminology.

He used to say, "I am the chaplain of the Naval Support Element (NSE actually meant National Support Element)." He likened the combat logistics patrols to the convoys out of Halifax in the Second World War. The RG-31 armoured vehicles were the destroyers, and the insurgents, with the improvised explosive devices and ambushes, were the U-boats.

As for other ways of contributing to the cause, at least three Kandahar sailors at the time had members of their progeny who also served in support of various missions.

The Task Force Kandahar Legal Advisor, former Commander Bonita Thornton, had a daughter who had just finished her tour in Kandahar as a communications research operator; the Padre had a son, a MARS officer, who had recently completed a tour as part of Task Force 150; and finally, yours truly had one son serving as a boatswain and another, an Army communications technician, who deployed to Kandahar on Roto 8.

In spite of all the different backgrounds, every scallywag who had the privilege of running aground in Kandahar agreed upon one thing. Our mission was very important and worth our personal and collective sacrifices in order to help Afghans find some stability and security. ♣



2003 HMCS *Iroquois* (centre forward), HMCS *Regina* (left) and HMNZS *Te Mana* (New Zealand warship at rear) sail in a diamond formation in the Arabian Gulf in 2003, as part of Task Force 151 and the international campaign against terrorism.

Photo: Cpl Shawn Hall, DND

UAVS: Valuable Theatre Assets

It was clear by 2008 that the flow of information supporting counter-insurgency operations in Afghanistan needed to grow in both quantity and quality. As a result, the Canadian Heron Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Detachment, known as Task Force (TF) Erebus, deployed to Afghanistan in 2009.

"Task Force Erebus was unique in what it brought to the battlespace," said Colonel Al Meinzinger, then Joint Task Force Afghanistan Air Wing commander.

"The efficient gathering of information and increased battlespace awareness that the Heron team provided since the beginning of operations in January 2009 helped to enable the counter-insurgency campaign and also served to save soldiers' lives. We are very proud of the TF Erebus efforts."

TF Erebus ended its flying operations on July 7, 2011, with the end of the Canadian Forces combat mission in Afghanistan.

"The CU-170 Herons were flown extensively throughout the Task Force Kandahar area of operations and brought a high level of situational awareness to the mission," said Col Meinzinger.

"The skills and knowledge that we have acquired can be exploited in the future. The soldiers, sailors, airmen and airwomen who worked with TF Erebus over the years acquired a high level of proficiency due to their professionalism and dedication."

By the end of operations, TF Erebus was credited with 837 flying missions representing 15,000 operational hours with only 198 personnel distributed over five rotations.

The task force achieved several milestones during the last rotation of personnel, including a mission of more than 30 hours, the longest flight undertaken by a Canadian Heron crew, and an unprecedented stretch of 116 hours – just shy of five full days – of continuous intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance coverage.

Nineteen TF Erebus civilian personnel who rotated through Kandahar received the General Service Medal, which is awarded to Canadians and allied forces serving with the CAF. Depending on the operation, it may also be awarded to Canadians who are not members of the CAF who serve outside of Canada directly supporting the CAF and its operations in the presence of an armed enemy. ✦

Farewell to the Sperwer

After six tactical unmanned aerial vehicle (TUAV) flight rotations in Afghanistan, the Sperwer's mission came to an end on April 17, 2009.

With a roar of its engine, the little plane with the huge job was sent flying into the dark Afghan sky. Troops who had gathered to see the final launch watched the tiny blinking light as it gained altitude, changed direction and headed out on its final mission. The sound of cheers and sighs mixed in the air.

Roto 6 of the TUAV Flight comprised a mix of Army and Air Force members hailing from 400 Tactical Helicopter Squadron, Borden, Ont., 4 Air Defence Regiment, Moncton, N.B., and other augmenting units. Pilots, artillery soldiers, analysts, maintainers, technicians, clerks and signals operators each had their own important roles, but all worked together to ensure that every flight had the best chance at success.

The final rotation from August 2008 to April 2009 clocked about 30.5 per cent of the hours flown by all six rotations. Overall, during its time in-theatre, the Sperwer flew approximately 4, 270 hours and more than 1,300 trips.

One of Sperwer's defining successes was its ability to fly during some occasions when no other craft could. The plane was designed so that it could handle fierce weather while continuing to provide imagery even during low cloud cover. Its infrared imaging capacity could deliver accurate intelligence any time of the day.

Captain Mark Horstead, a Sperwer mission commander on Roto 6, said he firmly believes that the Sperwer's presence in Afghanistan was beneficial. "A couple of IED [improvised explosive device] emplacement teams are no longer out there due to our efforts," he said. "Hopefully, such successes and the value of having us buzz around have saved a few Canadian and Allied lives."

The CU-170 Heron unmanned aerial vehicle is now carrying out Canada's UAV missions in Afghanistan. ✦

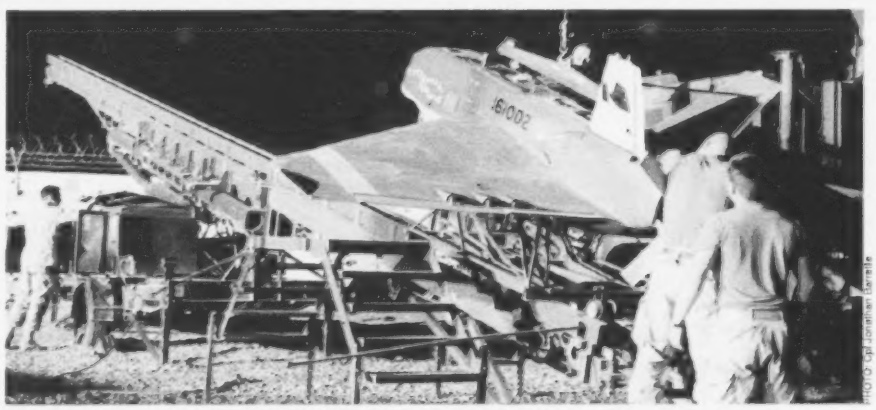


Photo: Sgt Jeremy Dennis

Members of the TUAV Flight prepare the CU-161 Sperwer for its final mission.

2004 | During a foot patrol in Kabul in March 2004, Corporal Robert Giguère of the 3rd Battalion, Royal 22e Régiment Battle Group, marches past the King's Palace.

2010 | Engineers work on assembling a Mabey-Johnson bridge (a portable pre-fabricated truss bridge) in Kandahar, in March 2010.

Afghanistan Air Wing Closes

BY CAPT NICOLE MESZAROS

On August 18, 2011, 150 airmen, airwomen and soldiers marked the closure of the Joint Task Force Afghanistan (JTF-Afg) Air Wing.

Two of the Air Wing's three flying squadrons had already left Afghanistan. The Canadian Helicopter Force Afghanistan conducted its last flight on July 27, 2011 and the Canadian Heron unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) Detachment ceased operations on July 7, 2011. The Tactical Airlift Unit, equipped with the CC-130 Hercules, flew missions until mid-November, both for the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in southern Afghanistan and in support of Operation ATTENTION in Kabul.

"For 32 months, the Air Wing has been conducting its operations properly with excellent air-land integration, an important capability for Canadians," said Brigadier-General Chuck Lamarre, commander of the Mission Transition Task Force. "Ground forces and air forces need to continue to plan together to guard against skill-fade in the area of integrated operations."

Colonel Al Meinziger, the Air Wing's last commander, summed up the formation's achievements.

"We ably supported the counter-insurgency campaign under Task Force Kandahar in an incredibly surged and professional fashion, then nimbly shifted our focus to position ourselves for supporting the daunting work associated with transitioning Air Wing equipment and material back to Canada under the Mission Transition Task Force," he said. "The Air Wing ensured its material was prepared for shipment home in the right state, the right sequence and at the right time." ◆

Col Al Meinzinger (left) hands over the official JTF-Afg Air Wing hockey stick, in its swaddling of RCAF tartan, to Maj Spencer Selhi of the Tactical Airlift Unit, the last CAF unit still flying in Afghanistan, during the Air Wing's closing ceremonies.

PHOTOS MCpl Dan Shoulders

Col Meinzinger addresses members from the Mission Transition Task Force and allied guests during the Air Wing close down ceremonies held at Kandahar Airfield on August 18, 2011.

Camp Mirage Memorial finds permanent home at 8 Wing Trenton

BY JILL ST. MARSEILLE

A memorial cairn honouring fallen members of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) during the Afghan mission is on permanent display at the National Air Force Museum at 8 Wing Trenton, Ont. The monument was moved from Camp Mirage when the CAF's theatre support element left the United Arab Emirates in 2010.

Conceived in 2005 by Air Force personnel serving in southwest Asia and erected in 2006, it commemorates the then 157 Canadians, including CAF members, a diplomat and a journalist, killed since the combat mission started in 2002.

"Camp Mirage, an air mobility base, was staffed overwhelmingly by Air Force personnel, many of them from [8] Wing," said then-commander of the Royal Canadian Air Force, Lieutenant-General André Deschamps. "Those intense Air Force bonds are why I find it so appropriate that this memorial cairn has found its permanent Canadian home here at the National Air Force Museum at another air mobility base."

It is a three-part granite structure incorporating a brass plate for each name of the fallen and an aptly named bas-relief Fallen, created by Canadian artist Silvia Pecota. The bas-relief depicts a guardian angel protecting a fallen soldier. Ms. Pecota donated Fallen's plaster mould and the Royal 22e Regiment financed the casting of two bronze copies; one is affixed to the Camp Mirage monument and the other was part of the Cenotaph in Kandahar. At the end of the combat mission, the boulder that formed the centrepiece of the Kandahar Cenotaph, to which the second plaque was affixed, went north to Kabul. The Chief of the Defence Staff directed that the boulder and plaque remain there until the end of the Canadian mission. They are currently in transit to Canada and are slated to arrive home in the spring.

The unveiling for the Mirage memorial in Trenton mirrored the final parade ceremony held for the memorial at Mirage; the Canadian flag that was lowered was raised again, a handful of the hundreds of poppies that adorned the bronze name plates were transported to once again adorn the cairn in Canada, and, although it stood outdoors at Mirage and is indoors in Trenton, the memorial itself was placed on artificial grass and stone tile to recreate how it was originally displayed.

The cairn came to Canada as part of Operation Keepsake, which ensures that mementoes, artefacts and memorials from in-theatre are brought back to Canada to forever be part of its history.

PHOTO Cheryl MacLeod

The Camp Mirage Memorial at dawn, in its original location.

"It gave me a great sense of pride and respect for the fallen to be given the responsibility to disassemble that memorial and bring it back," said Warrant Office Ed Storey, who works at the Canadian Joint Operations Command and was the initiator of Operation Keepsake. "It's like having the weight on your shoulders of all of the family members of the fallen and you want to make sure it comes back in one piece and reassembled in an appropriate location."

The unveiling came just one day before the transfer of command authority ceremony that brought an end to Canada's combat mission in Afghanistan on July 7, 2011. ◆

2010 | Cpl Jayson Rose, Cpl David Sinanan and Pte Szymon Poczta remove a sign in preparation for the closure of Camp Mirage in Southwest Asia, in October 2010.

Chinooks Wrap Up Afghanistan Duty

BY MAJ COLIN COAKWELL

As the last Chinook helicopter auxiliary power unit shut off on July 30, 2011, Kandahar Airfield's "X-Ray" ramp fell silent, marking the end of the Canadian Helicopter Force Afghanistan's (CHFA) operations, and the retirement of Canada's D-model Chinooks.

Six D-model CH-147 Chinooks were purchased from the US Army in 2008 and began flying on December 28, 2008, thereby improving aviation support available to Canadian troops in-theatre and reducing the risk from threats such as improvised explosive devices.

An ambitious training program was required before operations in Afghanistan began. Initial qualification training was conducted by the US Army in Fort Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania, and completed at Fort Rucker, Alabama. Aircraft maintainers were trained at the Boeing plant in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Training built on the experience that the aircrew and technicians brought from the CH-146 Griffon and other aircraft fleets. Additional operational training (called "seasoning") was conducted with US Army National Guard and US Army Reserve units to draw on operational lessons learned.

Chinook aircrew were deployed on a staggered deployment schedule, with a new crew of two pilots and two flight engineers arriving in-theatre approximately once per month. Canadian Army door-gunners were also employed, bringing combat arms experience to the crews.

Once established during Operation ATHENA's Roto 6, CHFA's aviation assets supported the International Security Assistance Force's Regional Command South, a relationship that saw CHFA aircraft supporting Canadian and coalition forces in Kandahar and Helmand provinces.

Most CHFA missions were "sustainment" missions, moving personnel and cargo to distant Forward Operating Bases (FOBs). CH-146 Griffons protected the Chinooks during most missions.

"Deliberate" missions, on the other hand, were planned to carry ground forces into specific areas. They were often conducted at night with support from other Canadian and coalition assets, including unmanned aerial vehicles (to look for insurgent activity in the vicinity of the landing zones) and transport aircraft such as Canadian CC-130 Hercules aircraft (to drop infrared flares during low light level conditions). While in Afghanistan, the Chinooks flew more than 7,000 hours, carrying more than 90,000 passengers and nearly 3,220 metric tons of cargo.

Two Chinooks were lost in Afghanistan: the first was downed by insurgent fire near FOB Masum Ghar on August 5, 2010, and the second rolled over on landing in dusty conditions on May 16, 2011. No lives were lost in either accident. ♣

PHOTO: Sgt Dave Kaiser

WO Adam Taylor, 2 Combat Engineer Regiment, communicates with a Canadian Chinook helicopter during an operation in the Panjwa'i district of Afghanistan.

PHOTO: Sgt Mathieu McGregor

Cpl Kyle Cameron, on board a CH-147D Chinook helicopter, clears his weapon after completing a mission.

PHOTO: Sgt Greg Malgrave

CAF Chinook helicopter returns to Kandahar Airfield after a day of re-supplying forward operating bases.

PHOTO: Cpl Rob Adamski

2010 Dust and debris swirl as a CH-147 Chinook helicopter lowers supplies in September 2010.

PHOTO: Cpl Robert Bate

2006 Soldiers from the 1st Battalion, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, search surrounding areas within Zhari District to remove Taliban forces in July 2006.

Afghanistan video documentaries

Army Public Affairs produced two feature video documentaries during the course of the Afghan mission. One, "Desert Lions", followed the day-to-day activities of a small group of Canadian soldiers as they worked to mentor members of the Afghan National Army. The other, "Op ATHENA", chronicled all aspects of a full rotation during the combat portion of the mission.

DESERT LIONS

"Desert Lions" delivers a gritty, extremely candid view of the challenges and opportunities faced by Canadian army mentors working to professionalize the Afghan National Army during the summer of 2010. The Desert Lions are a nine-man team deployed at Combat Outpost Lion in Nakhonay.

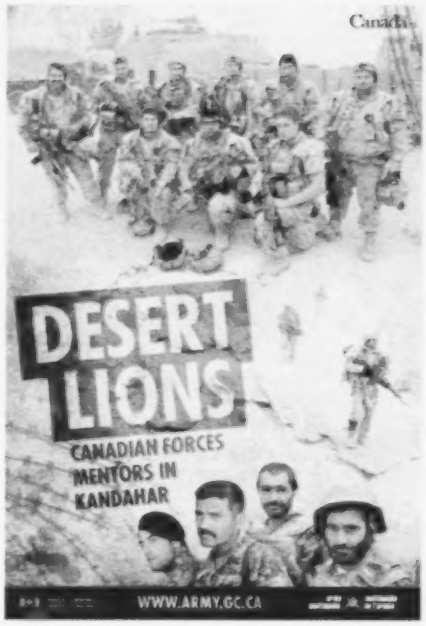
The heat is brutal, the living conditions are primitive and frustrations are numerous. Canadians and Afghans struggle to communicate with one another, but traces of humour remain.

Audiences have praised the film for delivering a raw and compelling picture of the realities facing Canadian soldiers, served up by a soldier-reporter who has seen war from both sides of the camera.

The documentary was shot on location and produced by Lieutenant-Colonel (Ret) Mike Vernon.

From 1981 to 1994, LCol Vernon served with Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, before leaving the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) to pursue a career in journalism. During his time with CBC, he was assigned to Afghanistan and spent time in Kandahar, Kabul and Bagram.

While at CBC, LCol Vernon continued to serve as a reservist, joining the Calgary Highlanders in 1999. He was the commanding officer of that regiment from 2007-2010. He retired from the CAF in August, 2011.



OP ATHENA

The goal of the documentary "Op ATHENA" was to demonstrate the many aspects of a Canadian Army combat rotation (ROTO) deployed in Afghanistan by chronicling the activities of the final ROTO of the combat portion of the Canadian Afghan mission. A team made up of two Army News videographers deployed with the members of the 1st Bataillon, Royal 22e Régiment Battle group (VanDoos) to Afghanistan for nine months from November 2010 to July 2011.

From assistance to civilian authorities (including construction projects and medical aid), to infantry patrols (which also often involved engineers, dog trainers with bomb sniffing dogs, medics, interpreters – and sometimes Public Affairs Officers and journalists), Forward Operating Bases, armour and artillery operations, air support, logistics support, transportation and feeding the troops, "Op ATHENA" shows not only the diverse activities carried out by our Canadian soldiers, but allows the audience to meet and get to know many of them, both on and off duty, as they explain what they are doing to support the mission.

The video was shot on location by Army videographers Sergeant Sébastien Fréchette and Corporal Julie Turcotte and was produced by Véronique Cantin of Army Public Affairs.

Both Desert Lions and Op ATHENA are available on the Army website – **www.army.gc.ca** as well as on YouTube ◆

Lock and Load – from the heart

"Lock and Load" was a song written and performed by Master Corporal (now Sergeant) Elton Adams, a soldier who completed a seven-month tour in Afghanistan.

The song recognizes and celebrates the accomplishments of Canadian soldiers on that mission.

Lock and Load (With Canada's Heroes)

They had to go, far away from home,
Saving Lives, winning hearts and minds,
Courage and valour was their code,
And they would never back down... so...

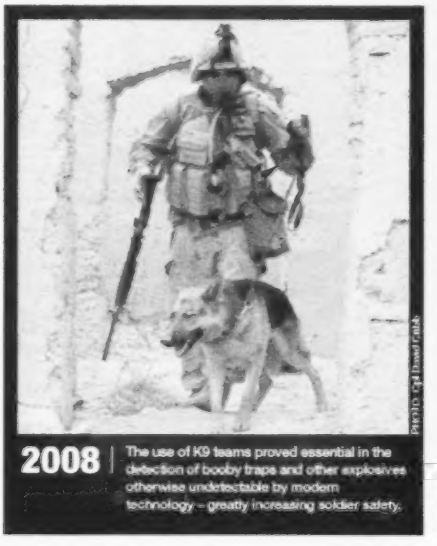
Let's lock and load with Canada's heroes
Yeah they did it right, let's honour those who are still alive
Let's lock and load with Canada's heroes
Remember who fought and died and cherish the ones who are here tonight
Let's lock and load

Building roads, fixing wells, lifting heavy loads,
Mending seams, so children can dream,
They believed, innocence should never bleed
To be brave, strong and proud was their creed

Let's lock and load with Canada's heroes
Yeah they did it right, let's honour those who are still alive
Let's lock and load with Canada's heroes
Remember who fought and died and cherish the ones who are here tonight
Let's lock and load

Gave Medicine to those in need
Little schools so kids can read
Helping the world to be free...every minute, every hour, every day...

Let's lock and load with Canada's heroes
Yeah they did it right, let's honour those who are still alive
Let's lock and load with Canada's heroes
Remember who fought and died and cherish the ones who are here tonight ◆



2008 | The use of K9 teams proved essential in the detection of booby traps and other explosives otherwise undetectable by modern technology – greatly increasing soldier safety.

2011 | Sgt Jim Nobbs obtains positive identification of a target from a CH-146 Griffon helicopter with a M134D Dhillon minigun during a training exercise in June 2011.

They have seen positive change

The numbers show that more than 40,000 Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) members served in Afghanistan over more than 12-year period – the largest military deployment since the Second World War – and many of those personnel deployed more than once.

Canada responded quickly after the 9/11 attacks, with Special Operations Forces and the Royal Canadian Navy deploying ships to Southwest Asia. By January 2002 more than 1,250 CAF members were on the ground in Afghanistan.

Master Warrant Officer Michael Thompson, Sergeant-Major of 28 Administration Squadron, 2 Combat Engineer Regiment, Petawawa, was one of those soldiers. With three tours under his belt, the 23-year veteran has seen changes in Afghanistan, mostly for the better. As part of the explosive ordnance disposal team on a six-month tour during Roto 0, he travelled throughout Kabul gathering and destroying unexploded ordnance hazards.

"I didn't deal with IEDs [improvised explosive devices]," he said, "because they [IEDs] weren't prevalent during Roto 0. We were gathering rockets, mortars, small arms, mines … helping to disarm and take away capabilities from warlords that were around Kabul."

After a two-year break, MWO Thompson was deployed back to Kabul, this time with combat engineer reconnaissance. With half of his deployed time spent in Kabul and the other half transitioning to Kandahar, he saw significant changes in Afghanistan.

More than 1,700 CAF members deployed to Kabul in 2003 in support of the NATO International Security Assistance Force mission. It was then that Canada provided an infantry battle group and the command element of a multi-national brigade enhancing security around Kabul. CAF members conducted foot patrols, surveillance missions, and armed raids looking for illegal weapons, among other things, and provided security for the national and provincial elections.

MWO Thompson was involved in route designation, bridge classifications, fortification of strong points, and forward operating bases. His Roto was responsible for getting things positioned for the next rotation in Kandahar.

The biggest change he saw was in Kabul proper. "There was a change in the economy," he said. "The population had grown, with more displaced people coming back to the area, and the ANA [Afghan National Army] and ANP [Afghan National Police] seemed a bit more established."

MWO Thompson said that, in Kabul, he noticed there was a much larger presence of Afghan National Police and Afghan National Army personnel than there had been during Roto 0. But his first impression of Kandahar was an eye-opener.

"It felt like Kabul at first, but a lot worse," he said. "The city was congested, not much rule, very chaotic – and was dubbed the 'wild, wild, west.'" he said with a laugh.

In 2005, Canada assumed responsibility from the US for the Kandahar Provincial Reconstruction Team. More than 350 military police, foreign affairs and correctional services personnel, formed a whole-of-government team. This time, the threat level for Battle Group members who were building the roads and bridges, and transitioning from Kabul to Kandahar, was much higher.

Then, in February 2006, Canada took command of Regional Command (South) as troop commitment moved from Kabul to Kandahar. That was when the CAF began conducting combat operations in one of Afghanistan's most volatile regions, and the Canadian battle group was augmented by an air wing that provided tactical airlift to CAF and ISAF forces. Operational Mentor and Liaison Teams (OMLTs) worked mentoring the Afghan Army and Afghan Police.

In 2007, Sergeant Loup Guimond, B Company, 5 Platoon, 3 Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry Edmonton, headed to Kandahar as a rifleman with 2 Royal Canadian Regiment Battle Group. Straight out of battle school, Sgt Guimond was excited to hit the ground running and do what he was trained to do. "I really enjoyed my six-month tour," he said.

Sgt Guimond deployed back to Kandahar in 2009, working with the OMLT to mentor the Afghan Army in artillery handling and conducting patrols, as the Afghans actively started training their army and police forces.

One change Sgt Guimond noticed was in the landscape around Panjwayi. "Due to the '06 offence, there was a lot of fighting in the area and there weren't many people living in the outlying areas," he said. "When I came back it was a lot greener, and people were more active and moving back into their houses."

In 2011, MWO Thompson deployed back to Kandahar for his third tour, for ten months as a counter-IED squadron quarter master, managing the logistics of outfitting, maintaining, and supplying equipment for all IED operators and their teams.

The biggest changes he noted were the number of troops on the ground, and that the CAF were in the fight with a much higher threat level. "I also believe we were a more professional battle group," said MWO Thompson. "All our lessons learned over the past five years … we got really good at what we were doing and very good at reacting to change."

As for Kandahar City, MWO Thompson said it had changed quite a bit, and he could see that more people had moved back into the area. The professionalism of the ANA and ANP increased as they developed their own Special Forces and infrastructure.

Completing two prior tours, as well as other overseas missions, allowed MWO Thompson to get along with less at times because "it could be worse," he said. The biggest change he saw from Roto 0 was "the improvements, that there was hope even though there was a lot of doom and gloom all around us. We [the CAF] have matured more to be forward thinkers and problem-solvers. I tested and challenged all my skills."

Canada's combat role in Kandahar ended in July 2011, and CAF members returned to Kabul to support the NATO Training Mission – Afghanistan (NTM-A). This was when Sgt Guimond returned for his third tour, working with the Afghan Army again but this time in Kabul, NTM-A Roto 0.

"Kabul was a whole different animal from Kandahar," said Sgt Guimond. "We were there as mentors and observers – where the OMLT was more hands-on training and we were able to help instruct them on how they could improve."

Sgt Guimond said one of the many things the CAF did properly was to send in well-trained combat troops. "Working with other countries was great, and being able to get a different perspective on how they operate, but most importantly we could gauge how good our guys are."

As for lasting change, Sgt Guimond did see some change among the younger Afghan population. "As combat troops, it's easy to say 'yes, we had our successes, and mission accomplished' … but I think lasting change will come with integration of communications like the Internet, and education, especially in the cities like Kabul, where people can actually see what the outside world is like. And the youth will see life can be better … and make that change." ◆

The Office of the JAG and the Mission in Afghanistan

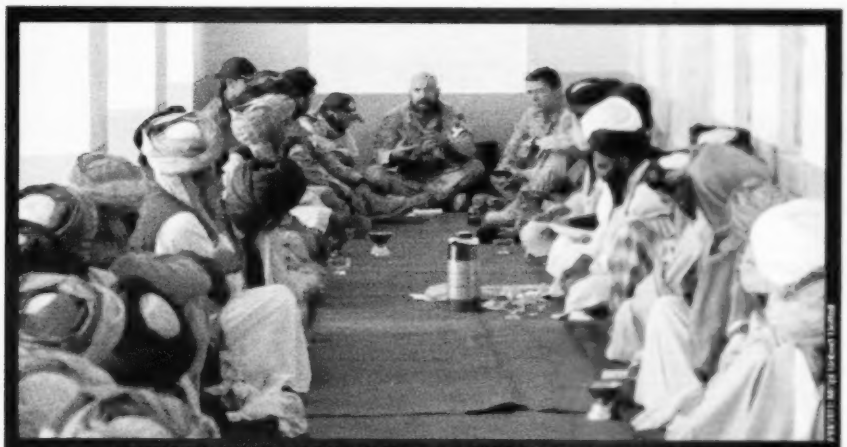
Over the course of Canada's mission to Afghanistan, CAF Legal Officers were deployed into that Theatre of Operations on more than 100 occasions for tours of up to one year. These numbers represent a significant proportion of the Office of the Judge Advocate General, which is only formed of 160 Regular Force Legal Officers and 55 Reservists. The Legal Office's commitment to the Afghanistan mission is even more impressive when its concurrent contribution to other activities is considered. From 2002 to 2013, up to 25% of the JAG Office's effective strength was deployed on international operations and operational training exercises in any given year.

In Afghanistan, legal advice was provided in several distinct contexts. This included strategic advice to the Government of Afghanistan, operational law advice to both conventional military operations and special operations at the battle group and unit levels, administrative law and military justice advice to Provincial Reconstruction Teams, and mentoring, advice and training to those members of the Afghan justice and law enforcement community tasked with being the boots on the ground in the struggle to establish the rule of law in that country.

Support for the mission in Afghanistan was also provided by those Legal Officers based in Ottawa working from dedicated groups within the Office of the Judge Advocate General who assisted their colleagues in Afghanistan when particularly specialized questions required detailed analysis by these subject matter experts.

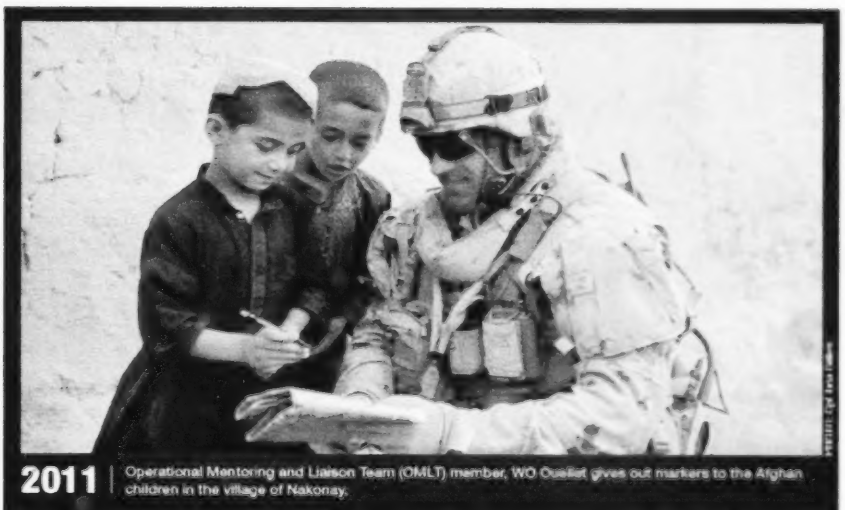
The mission of the Office of the Judge Advocate General is a particularly broad and challenging one. It expects Legal Officers to provide independent and operational legal advice on issues across the entire spectrum of military law. The undoubted ability of Canadian Legal Officers to discharge their mission has been long acknowledged and was reconfirmed by their commitment to the CAF's task in Afghanistan. However, due to the number of deployments, Legal Officers in Afghanistan not only did their job while sharing the hardships of their fellow deployed soldiers – they also left behind fewer colleagues who therefore shouldered the challenging increase in the amount of work and responsibility to successfully discharge their mission in relation to other matters requiring legal advice.

In this, the closing days of Canada's mission in Afghanistan, it is worthwhile to make note of the significant proportion of the CAF's Legal Office who deployed to Afghanistan, or who supported the mission from Ottawa, or who took on two or more formal taskings to cover off one or more deployed colleagues. With the continuing growth in the complexity of legal issues arising from military operations, it is likely that the demand for legal advice and services from Canada's military lawyers will continue. It is also certain that Legal Officers of the Office of the Judge Advocate General will continue to serve the Canadian Armed Forces and the Government of Canada at home and abroad by contributing to a disciplined force and to mission success in a manner which supports Canadian values and the Rule of Law. ◆



2007 | Capt Michel Larocque, a Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC) Officer with the Provincial Reconstruction Team, speaks at a shura (assembly) of Panjwai elders. To his left is Maj Patrice Robichaud of the 3rd Battalion, Royal 22e Régiment, from Valcartier, Que.

2009 | Sgt Tanya Casey greets an Afghan woman during the Muslim holy day of Eid al-Adha in November 2009.



2011 | Operational Mentoring and Liaison Team (OMLT) member, WO Ouellet gives out markers to the Afghan children in the village of Nakonay.

Finding his way: Our first Muslim Chaplain in Afghanistan

Military chaplains have played important roles throughout Canadian military history, but none more important than during a time of conflict. So for Captain Suleyman Demiray, the first Muslim chaplain in the Canadian Armed Forces, heading to Afghanistan was a huge responsibility.

When Capt Demiray left for a six-week technical assistance visit – his first tour to Kabul, Afghanistan was in 2005 – other than his unit padre duties, he didn't know what was expected of him. But after his first encounter with the local Afghans at a shura (a formal Islamic consultation and deliberation meeting), what his role there would be became clear to him and to the CAF commanders.

"My training was to support our troops as a chaplain, but I was looking for other ways I could contribute to the mission," he said.

When CAF members from various units moved about the villages gathering information and holding weekly shuras with local leaders and elders for updates, Capt Demiray was invited to go along and see if he could be of assistance.

"It was typical Afghanistan," he said with a chuckle. "A very chaotic situation, so I asked, through an interpreter because I do not speak the language, 'can you tell the mayor I am an Imam and I'd like to offer an opening restoration of the Koran and prayer'."

As startled civil-military cooperation members feared there might be cultural repercussions, his request had the opposite effect. "It was a cultural shock for the locals," said Capt Demiray, "because they saw me in a uniform, not the typical Imam appearance. But when I started the prayer, the chaotic situation was gone, everything was calm, and the attention was focused on us… then, at the end, they asked, 'please bring the Imam each time'," he said with a laugh.

That was when Capt Demiray realized what else, beyond his chaplain duties, he could offer the mission. "This gave me a good indication of what I can contribute as a Muslim chaplain. Even though my appearance wasn't the same as theirs, they were willing to accept my knowledge and understanding of their culture."

When Capt Demiray deployed to Kandahar in 2006 for six months, he found the environment different from that in Kabul, saying that it was rigid and more conservative. During this rotation, he worked more with other government departments, and he felt more confident when communicating with the local religious leaders.

"Even though I was using practical Arabic, I managed to communicate with the locals. I did a cold prayer …which was very well-received and the locals were surprised by my uniform."

Capt Demiray's calming prayers at the local meetings earned him a nickname as "The Hidden Weapon of the CAF."

After his deployment to Kandahar, Capt Demiray did two more tours. So how did his time in Afghanistan help him move forward in the CAF?

"The Afghan experience helped broaden my perspective on many things and I was honoured to serve in Afghanistan in all conditions."

But one challenge he faced was trying to find balance between his unit padre duties and being the subject matter expert on Muslim issues for the mission, which took up a lot of his time.

"It wasn't fair for my teammates," he said, "because they were covering my unit duties. I know we have to be max flex and do our best, but it was a challenge for sure."

Capt Demiray now shares his Afghanistan experiences with university students across the country. "After I came back I went to St. Paul University and talked about my experiences and advised on Islam-related issues."

Capt Demiray says it was a great experience over all, and he is proud to have been the first NATO Muslim advisor, especially as a Canadian. "It was a huge responsibility and a huge honour…and I'm proudly carrying my two medals." ◆

The Dual Aspect of Health: Caring for Soldiers' Bodies and Minds

The Canadian mission in Afghanistan has been a collaborative effort with international partners. It comes as no surprise that the mechanism for treating injured or ill Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) members has taken the same approach.

For close to a decade, the Canadian Casualty Support Team (CST) has used its comprehensive multinational support network to assist injured or ill CAF members serving in Afghanistan.

At its peak, the CST was composed of eight multi-disciplinary CAF members. The current administration is comprised of three: Administration Officer Annika Roussel, Aeromedical Evacuation Nursing Liaison Officer Lieutenant Kelsey Penner and Chief Clerk Warrant Officer Daniel Bergeron.

The evacuation process for wounded soldiers on the battle front involves several steps. "Patients are picked up from point of injury via the US Blackhawk helicopters, stabilized and transported to a Role 2 or Role 3 facility [in theatre]," explains Lt Penner. "Patients are then transported via the United States Air Force Aeromedical Evacuation team to the Landstuhl Regional Medical Center (LRMC) in Germany. Once treated and stabilized at LRMC, they are transported back to Canada through the Canadian aeromedical evacuation system."

The LRMC is the only American level 1 trauma centre outside of the US. A level I trauma centre provides the highest degree of surgical care to trauma patients. Being treated at one of these centres increases a patient's chance of survival by up to 25 per cent. These remarkable facilities have education and outreach programs, full-range of equipment, with a wide variety of surgeons and specialists who contribute to the LRMC's impressive designation.

Patients from approximately 50 coalition nations have been treated at the LRMC. The CST has been well integrated in sharing the responsibilities of patient care. "Canadian nursing staff have provided clinical assistance in the Intensive Care Unit for both Canadian and US patients," comments Lt Penner on Canadian involvement at LRMC.

The CST has succeeded in making patients and their family members feel as comfortable and at home as possible. The LRMC Fisher House has provided a cozy residence for over 9,500 families from 27 countries, including 40 Canadian families. The LRMC Chaplain's Closet distributes clothes, calling cards, and entertainment items among other goods. Canadian soldiers are also given a handmade Quilt of Valour, donated by a group of volunteer quilters from across Canada, to keep them warm and remind them of the support from the home front. Capt Roussel notes how "this helps to contribute to patient morale."

The success of the CST cannot be understated. "The statistics speak for themselves," says Capt Roussel. "The CST has had a total of 391 patients since its existence. Many of these patients were Very Seriously Injured status, therefore the CST provided support to their next of kin and Assisting Officer." The CST has been an integral part of the process that shows CAF members the high quality care that they deserve.

As the CAF mission in Afghanistan comes to a close, the requirement for the CST at the LRMC will decrease. Personnel will return home in March 2014 at the same time as Canada's military mission in Afghanistan ends. Responsibilities will transfer to the NATO Geilenkirchen Base. ◆

Landstuhl, Germany; 1 June 2011 - Capt Pascal Desilets, Catholic padre from the Casualty Support Team at Landstuhl Regional Medical Center (LRMC), welcomes and reassures a patient as he is offloaded from the ambulance bus at the LRMC front entrance

PHOTOS: Maple Pierre Thériault

Ramstein US Air Force Base, Germany; 31 May 2011 - MS Chad Mills, medical technician and members of the Casualty Support Team (CST) situated in Landstuhl Regional Medical Center, helps American medical personnel carry an unidentified casualty on a stretcher into a bus before getting him on board a C-17 Globemaster aircraft. This casualty is being transferred to the US for continuing care.

Returning from Afghanistan: Keeping health a priority

After over 12 years of intense engagement, the Canadian military mission in Afghanistan is coming to an end. While many positive changes occurred during Canada's engagement, including building the capacity of the Afghan National Security Forces, allowing them to stabilize and secure their own country, this did not come without a cost.

Many members have been affected by injuries as a result of the mission in Afghanistan. Notwithstanding that the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) entered the mission with a strong health care system, the organization continues to learn from its experience and is constantly changing and improving its procedures. Taking care of members and their health care needs is a priority and throughout the mission the CAF remains dedicated to improving programs and available support for members.

For example, for those members who are severely ill or injured, the Joint Personnel Support Unit, created in 2009, provides focused, individual assistance and expedites access to CAF and Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) programs, family support expertise, and peer support. Additionally, members have a chain of command focused on their unique needs and challenges, as well as finding the right return-to-work opportunities.

The Soldier On program, instituted in the CAF in 2006, provides resources and opportunities to serving and retired CAF personnel with a permanent or chronic illness or injury to actively participate in physical, recreational or sporting activities. It supports ill or injured personnel in increasing their independence, developing new skills, achieving goals and opening the door for other opportunities. Members are provided with access to equipment such as hand-cycles, sit skis, fishing equipment, hockey sledges and basketball wheelchairs, allowing them to re-introduce themselves to an active lifestyle.

With respect to mental health care, the CAF has been providing ongoing resilience training since 2009 through the Road to Mental Readiness program helping to ensure that personnel and their families are best equipped for the stressors associated with deployment. Peer support is also available to CAF members, veterans, and their families through the Operational Stress Injury Social Support (OSISS), where support is provided by trained individuals who have themselves experienced an operational stress injury.

The goal of CAF support and care is always to return personnel to duty as soon as medically possible. Following rehabilitation, and only if members cannot redeploy and meet the exigencies of operations, they may eventually be released from the CAF.

Although the mission in Afghanistan is coming to an end, our mission to support those who have become ill and injured is just beginning, and this mission has no end date. ♦

Cpl Dale Cross of the Soldier On Program conducts movement testing on a virtual simulator at an Ottawa Rehabilitation Centre as part of his preparedness training for Nijmegen 2012.

For more information on the mental health resources available to CAF members and their families please visit the CAF Community webpage at **http://www.forces.gc.ca/en/caf-community.page** and click "You're not alone – Mental Health resources" found under the website's Health Services section.

CAF members can also call the Member Assistance Program at 1-800-268-7708.

Family members can call the Family Information Line at 1-800-866-4546.

The power of Red Friday still going strong

You can't talk about the Canadian Armed Forces mission in Afghanistan without also talking about the support of families and Canadians back home and the effect their support had on the troops.

The CAF mission in Afghanistan garnered a lot of media attention over more than 12 years, but there is one event here in Canada which started out as a simple gesture by two women, and grew into something much more: the Red Friday.

The brain child of Lisa Miller, a military spouse and Karen Kelly, local Petawawa resident, affectively known as the Red Friday Ladies, their idea came about after discussing a chain email video they watched in 2005. It so happened that in this American video people were wearing red to support the troops.

"But the message was very negative, it said the troops don't belong there, let's bring them all home," said Ms. Kelly. "We thought [wearing red] was a great idea, but the message was all wrong."

So the ladies took the video theme as an outline and came up with a plan that would show Canadian support by wearing red on Friday's, but put a more positive spin on the idea. "We made it positive and Canadian," she said.

So Ms. Miller and Ms. Kelly started their plan to wear red on Friday to show support, with hopes of raising the profile of the CAF mission. They thought it might be a hard sell at first but once word got out about their idea, it took on a life of its own as Red Rallies began taking place across the country.

"We were shocked," said Ms. Kelly. "I've lived in Petawawa all my life and she [Ms. Miller] had recently moved here, [...] so we thought it would be a good idea."

From there the idea exploded... "We thought it would stay local in the Ottawa Valley, so when it spread across Ontario, it was a nice unexpected surprise," said Ms. Kelly.

The Red Rally momentum still exists and the Red Friday Ladies are still busy garnering support for the troops mostly through social media.

"We have a Facebook page that we update every Friday," said Ms. Kelly **[facebook.com/pages/The-Red-Friday-Ladies/92824721461]**. "There is still a big response and when we're out on Friday we see lots of people wearing red."

The Red Friday initiative has helped raise the positive support for the troops across the country. The ladies still encourage people to wear red, even though the military mission has closed out. Ms. Kelly feels it's the least they can do—let them know we are still thinking about them.

"We've been really clear in telling people, we're not doing this just because they're in the midst of a war. This is a means to show support for the soldiers and their families. No matter where the soldiers are, they need the support." ♦

Thousands of supporters gathered on Parliament Hill to participate in a Red Friday Public Rally.

Supporting our troops

Support for the mission in Afghanistan comes in all forms. Some wore a uniform and carried a weapon; some wore an apron and carried scissors – combat barbers, as they were affectionately known.

Barbers and other civilian staff such as travel officers, gym staff, and retail personnel, who worked at CANEX or Tim Hortons, were part of the more than 1,200 Canadian Forces Personnel Support Agency (CFPSA), who worked at either the Theatre Support Element (TSE) – Southwest Asia or Kandahar Airfield (KAF).

The journey began when people applied on-line for positions available in-theatre. "CFPSA got over 3,000 online applications when I applied," says CFPSA welfare manager Bill Pigden (in 2010). "These were then weeded down to 100 training positions, and sent to Kingston, Ontario, for a two-week period, and then were weeded down to the 66 people who became employees. We [CFPSA] follow the same rules as CAF members."

So who were these support civilians? They ranged in age from 20-years-old to 60-years-old. Some tours were 70 per cent women, where half were women over 50. Some came to Afghanistan because they had a loved one killed or wounded here and they wanted to work in this location. Some were retired CAF personnel who just wanted to help out.

For many, this was their first experience with the military, so the two-week training period consisted of learning about how the military works, the rank structure, team building, stressors such as lack of sleep, difficult situations and how to interact with people. "They needed to deal with working long hours, because they would be working seven days a week," said Mr. Pigden. "They also received cultural training, IED and first-aid training ... advice on the basic things to bring with them and what it would be like to live there for six months. They had to give 100 per cent while they were here."

All CFPSA funds generated in KAF, such as from the sale of toothbrushes and souvenirs, plus all Tim Hortons profits, stayed in-theatre. "The money was divided up among the soldiers' units, the bases they come from for their MFRCs, and some of it was used for projects that benefitted all the soldiers."

Some CFPSA staff returned for a second or third tour. The barbers, travel officers and gym staff travelled to the forward operating bases (FOBs). "They went out for five to 10 days at a time." Gym employees travelled to the FOBs to maintain the equipment, design fitness programs and travel officers spent time at the FOBs helping soldiers plan their home leave travel assistance. "You can't make a mistake on a soldier's trip home," he says with a laugh.

CFPSA retail staff was also busy making sure the troops had the necessities – toothpaste, shaving cream, just the simple things in life, but it was not always easy. "We were fully equipped to do the job," Mr. Pigden says. "But a lot of it was issues of supply you couldn't help it; you were in Afghanistan. Yeah! We're out of shaving cream, and it is a hazardous item that you can't ship on a plane. All these little things that you'd just like to have but you can't go next door to to the store and get. We learn to adapt."

And the supply issue wasn't always basic items. "There were some shipping issues with doughnuts. When the dough was shipped by truck, sometimes it would get delayed with no refrigeration, and when you open the sea container, it was just a big yeast ball," he says. "No Timmy's doughnuts was not good for troop morale." ♠

PHOTO: Sgt Matthew McGregor

Canadian comedian and television personality Rick Mercer serves Tim Horton's coffee at Kandahar Airfield on Canada Day 2011.

PHOTO: Cpl Simon Duchaine

2007 | Sorting holiday packages at Kandahar Airfield, December 2007.

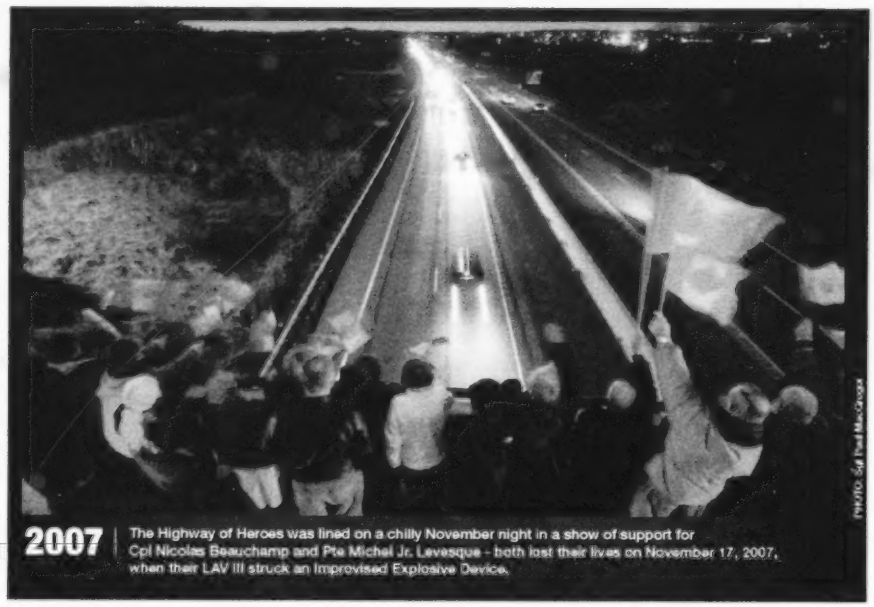


PHOTO: Sgt Paul MacGregor

2007 | The Highway of Heroes was lined on a chilly November night in a show of support for Cpl Nicolas Beauchamp and Pte Michel Jr. Levesque - both lost their lives on November 17, 2007, when their LAV III struck an Improvised Explosive Device.

Third Location Decompression - getting the tools and time to relax and reintegrate

Cyprus is home to many things: beautiful beaches, ancient ruins, weather that most Canadians can only dream of, and, for three days at a time, Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) members returning from their deployment on Operation ATTENTION. Troops stop off in Cyprus before being reunited with their loved ones to complete their Third Location Decompression (TLD).

The TLD reintegration program gives CAF personnel a structured environment to unwind, relax and prepare for the transition from operations in Afghanistan to domestic life in Canada.

"Of course the overall goal here is to facilitate transition from a high stress environment overseas to a domestic environment at home dealing with those everyday issues that come up. How we do that is by giving these members the tools to identify if they are having issues and how to get help for those issues," says Master Warrant Officer Wayne Bantock, Sergeant-Major at TLD.

Fifty-four personnel, both military and civilian, are in charge of setting up and operating the decompression centre. The personnel are split into a duty platoon, military police platoon, mental health section, orderly room, a personal support program (PSP) group and a headquarters section. The staff comes together to open the hotel and runs it for the transitioning CAF while communicating with headquarters.

The majority of the team is force generated for each TLD meaning new staff provides support for each transition mission. Within five days of arriving, it is the responsibility of the new staff to get the hotel up and running in time to greet the 100 to 120 decompressing CAF members.

According to the Commanding Officer of Third Location Decompression, Lieutenant-Colonel Sean Ward, there are three main tenets of the decompression centre: mental health, rest and relaxation, and safety and security.

Mental health briefings are required for all of the decompressing troops. In total, they spend four hours in structured group sessions learning strategies for things like coping with stress, fostering healthy relationships and anger management.

The mental health education team includes both and mental health expertise, such as a clinician, mental health aide, social worker or mental health nurse and peer support.

"I do a lot of the signs or symptoms, things we should be looking for," said Sergeant Jamie Raycroft while explaining the mental health briefing that is provided to troops during their TLD. "We give them some mental health strategies as well as some tools to implement when they go home to help with the integration process. We're operating at 220 in-theatre, and the challenge is trying to bring it down to 110." (As of the end of March all personnel are back in Canada.)

PHOTO: MWO Rob Weatherby

Cyprus, 18 January 2014 – A sunny view of the TLD hotel where CAF members complete their decompresson from Op ATTENTION.

As far as rest and relaxation the possibilities are plentiful. Lounging by the pool, taking advantage of the spa services, the games and music room, plus hundreds of DVDs are just some of the activities that can be found at the hotel.

The decompressing troops choose from a variety of organized activities on their second day in Cyprus including a wine tour, mountain biking and rock climbing. On the third day, the PSP team organizes full-day trips.

"The day three favourite is definitely the Kourion, Limassol and Omodos excursion," says Norma Woods, one of three PSP staff at Third Location Decompression. "They go to the ruins of Kourion, to Aphrodites hill, to Limassol and then a small town called Omodos... where they have a meal called a mezze which is basically 15 different courses with wine tasting."

While relaxation is part of the experience of TLD it cannot come at the cost of safety and security.

"The most important line of operation while they're here is their safety and security," says LCol Ward.

Safety nets are in place for decompressing troops that choose to drink alcohol and outlining and patrolling areas that they are not allowed to go. Prior to the arrival of the decompressing troops, the staff runs through different scenarios and situations to ensure everyone knows what do to in the case of an emergency.

The final group of CAF personnel will go through the TLD reintegration program in March 2014 when Op ATTENTION draws to a close. ✦

PHOTO: Mcpl Yves Pelletier

2004 | Major Richard Sneddon of the Royal 22e Régiment helps an Afghan boy fly his Canadian flag kite.

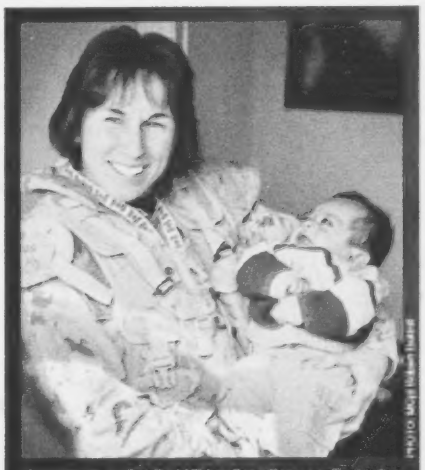


PHOTO: Mcpl Robert Hare

2009 | Sgt Geri Hibbs, Canadian coordinator for Global Point Afghanistan, visits an Afghan orphanage in Kabul and holds the school manager's infant son in January 2009.

Mission Close-Out Team: Our movers and shakers

Imagine planning a move of equipment and people after a more than 12-year mission mission – from a country where even the best-laid plans can be delayed. This has been the daily life of the Mission Close-Out Team (MCT) for the last seven months.

The close-out plan for the equipment move from Afghanistan started over a year ago by Canadian Joint Operations Command tasking the Canadian Forces Joint Operational Support Group in Kingston, Ont., which is responsible for executing the termination of a CAF operation.

THE PLANNING

Originally, the plan was to start moving materiel in March 2013 with the main body of the MCT not arriving until mid-August. But those plans were adjusted to coincide with the final Roto leaving Kabul in March 2014. The MCT mission started with an advance party arriving in June whose purpose was to create the preliminary tactical plan for the MCT.

"From there, we started growing, and at our largest we had 182 people," said Colonel Stephen Blair, commander of MCT. "When we found out we had to advance things, the biggest challenge we had to tackle was arranging the schedule of moving things by plane or by sea. So we worked hand in glove with CCTM-A [Canadian Contribution Training Mission-Afghanistan] because they had the skill sets that we could leverage, and not have to force-generate and train soldiers to come to theatre."

When MCT reviewed the documents listing warehouses, storage areas and other buildings, it was discovered that there was much less equipment than expected, which would have CAF personnel leaving theatre sooner.

"When we scaled the size of the mission, we realized early in the process that we had a lot less stuff, so we accelerated our downsizing and had every appreciation that we were going to send people home sooner," said Col Blair.

THE LOGISTICS

The logistics of moving such a large quantity of equipment not only involves sorting and packing to be placed on the next available plane or ship; some of the goods coming back to Canada need direct travel. These flights take a bit more time. "It takes a bit more planning for some of the special goods, such as communications equipment, weapons and ammunition which have to be sent direct," said Col Blair.

He relates moving these goods to that of an orchestra, where everyone has their piece to play. "I have to tap the baton and get things moving in the right direction," he said with a laugh. "But for the most part, the staff work was done in advance, which made it that much smoother, so the notes were on the score… for the most part it followed as planned."

WHAT STAYS, WHAT GOES?

Not everything was shipped back to Canada; it was pre-determined what would stay, what would be sold, and what would be destroyed. "We processed 283,592 individual items over 165 calendar days," said Col Blair. "Forty-one per cent of processed items were returned through Kuwait by sea, 24 per cent were sent home by aircraft and then 35 per cent was for disposal. As for the disposal, our priority was trying to donate it to a coalition partner or another Canadian government department that wanted it…then we looked at gratuitous transfer such as to schools; local hospitals and other charities; then the last would be selling it or, in fact, having it destroyed so it couldn't be used."

The goods that were to be sold went up on the website and could be bid on. "One of the lots to be bid on was hockey sticks, because pretty much every camp had its own little rink for pick-up games." Col Blair could even picture the local kids having their own street-hockey games. "You know, where the kids would yell "Car" and stop playing," said Col Blair with a chuckle. "But no; they were bought to be fire wood."

So as the MCT leave Afghanistan, they can be proud to say, "We finished ahead of schedule and were under budget," said Col Blair.

PHOTO: MCpl Paola Van Putten

Kabul, Afghanistan - November 18, 2013: Traffic technician, MCpl Whynot oversees the loading of a sea container full of Canadian equipment into an Antonov airplane during Operation ATTENTION.

Operation ATTENTION: More troops return home

As March 2014 is now upon us, Canada's military engagement in Afghanistan will come to an end. The last month and a half has been a very busy period for those deployed on the final rotation of Operation ATTENTION. Efforts overseas represent a crucial component of Canada's military legacy there - one that spans more than 12 years.

Since October 2013, 628 Canadian Armed Forces members have returned home and reunited with loved ones.

"Canadians can be proud of the work achieved and the roles each and every member played that contributed to enhancing the capabilities of the Afghans," said Lieutenant-General Stuart Beare, Commander Canadian Joint Operations Command. "Thanks to our help, Afghans continue to demonstrate the capability to lead and conduct training on their own."

The work accomplished in collaboration with international mission partners abroad, under the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), is no small feat. While a group of Canadians continued to provide training and advice at the ministry and senior levels within the Afghan national security forces (ANSF), others were responsible for packing up equipment and preparing personnel for their journey home. To that effect, since the mission shifted from training to transition, the Mission Closure Team has diligently overseen the return of 105 sea containers and 22 vehicles from Kabul.

"Maintenance of excellence in operations until day last is the hallmark of true professionals," said LGen Beare. "I wish to specifically thank members of the Mission Closure Team who completed the very challenging task of consolidating, taking inventory and making complex decisions to help reduce our military footprint in Afghanistan."

The return home of ISAF troops will continue to gain momentum throughout 2014. The international reduction of forces is directly linked to the growth in quality and quantity of the ANSF – a natural progression of the transition process as Afghans assume ownership of their security. The successful transition from international to Afghan forces is a true testament to mission success.

PHOTO: Sgt Norm McLean

Camp Souter, Afghanistan - October 27, 2013: Cpl Christopher Ott from 1 Service Battalion, Canadian Forces Base Edmonton, Alberta secures the straps on a pallet loaded back to Canada during Operation ATTENTION.

AFGHANISTAN

Honouring the fallen
Un hommage aux disparus

Pte/Sdt Nathan Loyd Smith
Sgt Marc Daniel Léger
Pte/Sdt Richard Anthony Green
Cpl Ainsworth Dyer
Sgt Robert Alan Short
Cpl Robbie Christopher Beerenfenger
Cpl Jamie Brendan Murphy
Pte/Sdt Braun Scott Woodfield
Glyn R. Berry
Cpl Paul James Davis
MCpl/Cplc Timothy James Wilson
Pte/Sdt Robert Howard Costall
Lt William Montague Turner
Cpl Randy Joseph Payne
Bdr Myles Stanley John Mansell
Cpl Matthew David James Dinning
Capt Nichola Kathleen Sarah Goddard, MSM
Cpl Anthony Joseph Boneca
Cpl Jason Patrick Warren
Cpl Francisco Oliver Gomez, CD
Cpl Christopher Jonathan Reid, CD
Cpl Bryce Jeffrey Keller
Sgt Vaughan Ingram
Pte/Sdt Kevin Yves Royal Dallaire
MCpl/Cplc Raymond Friedrich Arndt
MCpl/Cplc Jeffrey Scott Walsh
Cpl Andrew James Eykelenboom
Cpl David Robert William Braun
Sgt Shane Hank Stachnik
WO/Adj Frank Robert Mellish, CD
WO/Adj Richard Francis Nolan
Pte/Sdt William Jonathan James Cushley
Pte/Sdt Mark Anthony Graham
Cpl Keith Ian Morley
Cpl Shane Patrick Keating
Pte/Sdt David Robert James Byers
Cpl Glen Harold Arnold,CD
Pte/Sdt Joshua James Klukie
Cpl Robert Thomas James Mitchell
Sgt Craig Paul Gillam, CD
Tpr/Cvr Mark Andrew Wilson
Pte/Sdt Blake Neil Williamson
Sgt Darcy Scott Tedford, CD
Cpl Albert Hugh Storm, CD
CWO/Adjuc Robert Michel Joseph Girouard, CD
Cpl Ronald Kevin Megeney
Pte/Sdt Kevin Vincent Kennedy
Pte/Sdt David Robert Greenslade
Cpl Aaron Edward Williams
Cpl Christopher Paul Stannix
Cpl Brent Donald Poland
Sgt Donald Jason Lucas, CD
Tpr/Cvr Patrick James Pentland
MCpl/Cplc Allan Maurice James Stewart
MCpl/Cplc Anthony Mark Klumpenhouwer
Cpl Matthew Jonathan McCully
MCpl/Cplc Darrell Jason Priede
Tpr/Cvr Darryl James Caswell
Pte/Sdt Joel Vincent Wiebe
Cpl Stephen Frederick Bouzane
Sgt Christos Karigiannis
Pte/Sdt Lane William Thomas Watkins
Cpl Cole Daniel Bartsch
Cpl Jordan James Anderson
MCpl/Cplc Colin Stuart Francis Bason
Capt Jefferson Clifford Francis
Capt Matthew Johnathan Dawe
Pte/Sdt Simon Maurice Serge Longtin
MCpl/Cplc Christian Joseph Thomas André Duchesne
MWO/Adjum Mario Michel Christian Mercier, CD
Maj Raymond Mark Ruckpaul, CD
Cpl Nathan Hornburg
Pte/Sdt Michel Richard Lévesque
Cpl Nicolas Raymond Beauchamp
Gnr/Artil Jonathan Joseph Jacques Dion
Cpl Éric Labbé
WO/Adj Hani Massouh, CD
Tpr/Cvr Richard Joseph Gaetan Renaud
Cpl Étienne Gonthier
Tpr/Cvr Michael Yuki Hayakaze
Bdr Jérémie Ouellet
Sgt Jason James Boyes
Pte/Sdt Terry John Street
Cpl Michael Gunter Starker
Capt Richard Steven Leary
Capt Jonathan Sutherland Snyder
Cpl Brendan Anthony Downey
Pte/Sdt Colin William Wilmot
Cpl James Hayward Arnal
MCpl/Cplc Joshua Brian Roberts
MCpl/Cplc Erin Melvin Doyle
Sgt Shawn Allen Eades, CD
Cpl Dustin Roy Robert Joseph Wasden
Spr/Sap Stephan John Stock
Pte/Sdt Chadwick James Horn
Cpl Michael James Alexander Seggie
Cpl Andrew Paul Grenon
Sgt Prescott Shipway
Pte/Sdt Demetrios Diplaros
Cpl Mark Robert McLaren
WO/Adj Robert John Wilson, CD
Pte/Sdt John Michael Roy Curwin
Pte/Sdt Justin Peter Jones
Cpl Thomas James Hamilton
Pte/Sdt Michael Bruce Freeman
Sgt Gregory John Kruse, CD
WO/Adj Gaétan Joseph Francis Maxime Roberge, CD
Tpr/Cvr Brian Richard Good
Spr/Sap Sean David Greenfield
Cpl Kenneth Chad O'Quinn
Cpl Dany Olivier Fortin
WO/Adj Dennis Raymond Brown, CD
Tpr/Cvr Marc Hani Diab
Tpr/Cvr Corey Joseph Hayes
Tpr/Cvr Jack Bouthillier
Cpl Tyler Crooks
MCpl/Cplc Scott Francis Vernelli
Cpl Karine Marie Nathasha Blais
Maj Michelle Linda Mendes, CD
Pte/Sdt Alexandre Péloquin
Cpl Nicholas Ashley Bulger
Cpl Joseph Robert Martin Dubé
MCpl/Cplc Charles-Philippe Michaud
Cpl Martin Mario Joannette
MCpl/Cplc Patrice Yvon Audet, CD
Pte/Sdt Sébastien Joseph Gérard Omer Courcy
Cpl Christian Bobbitt
Spr/Sap Matthieu Joseph Pierre Gilbert Allard
Maj Joseph Yannick François Stephane Pépin
Cpl Jean-François Drouin
Pte/Sdt Patrick Joseph Lormand
Pte/Sdt Jonathan Joseph Sylvain Couturier
Lt Justin Boyes
Spr/Sap Steven Henry Marshall
Lt Andrew Richard Nuttall
Sgt George Rudolf Miok
Sgt Kirk Garret Taylor
Cpl Zachery Wilfrid McCormack
Michelle Lang
Pte/Sdt Garrett William Chidley
Sgt John Faught, CD
Capt Francis Cecil Paul, CD
Cpl Joshua Caleb Baker
Cpl Darren James Fitzpatrick
Pte/Sdt Tyler William Todd
PO 2/M 2 Douglas Craig Blake, CD
Pte/Sdt Kevin Thomas McKay
Col Geoffrey Stephen Parker, CD
Tpr/Cvr Larry John Rudd
Sgt Martin René Goudreault, CD
Sgt James Patrick MacNeil
Pte/Sdt Andrew Christopher Alexander Miller
MCpl/Cplc Kristal Lee-Anne Giesebrecht
Marc Cyr
Spr/Sap Brian James Collier
Cpl Brian Neil Calvin Pinksen
Cpl Steve Joseph Léo Martin
Cpl Yannick Scherrer
Bdr Karl Manning
MCpl/Cplc Francis Reginald Roy
MCpl/Cplc Byron Garth Greff

United States Armed Forces members who were under Canadian command

Les militaires des États-Unis qui relevaient du commandement canadien

Staff Sergeant Jesse W. Ainsworth
Specialist Brian Robert Bowman
Staff Sergeant Scott W. Brunkhorst
Senior Airman Michael John Buras
Staff Sergeant Christopher F. Cabacoy
Private First Class Joseph Caron
Private John Phillip Dion
Sergeant Donald R. Edgerton
Private First Class Patrick Scott Fitzgibbon
Technical Sergeant Adam K. Ginett
First Lieutenant Christopher S. Goeke
Sergeant Michael Keith Ingram Jr
Senior Airman Daniel James Johnson
Specialist Jason Johnston
Private First Class Richard Kevin Jones
Private Ryan Jeffrey Larson
Sergeant Joshua Allen Lengstorf
Staff Sergeant Edwardo Loredo
Paula Loyd
Sergeant Jason Adam McLeod
Private First Class Devin Jay Michel
Specialist Brendan P. Neenan
Sergeant James Michael Nolen
Specialist Bobby Justin Pagan
Sergeant Michael F. Paranzino
Private First Class Benjamin J. Park
Captain Paul Peña
Staff Sergeant John Allen Reiners
Sergeant First Class Charles H. Sadell
Private First Class Robinol Salvacion Jr.
Sergeant First Class Carlos M. Santos-Silva
Staff Sergeant Christopher T. Stout
Staff Sergeant Sheldon L. Tate
First Lieutenant Joseph J. Theinert
Private First Class Marcus A. Tynes
Corporal Jonathan Michael Walls
Sergeant Albert Dono Ware
Private First Class Matthew Everett Wildes
Sergeant Jeremiah Thomas Wittman
Private First Class Edwin C. Wood